



THE ELECTORATE AFTER SUMMER

September 2001

From August 14 to 23, 2001 the sociological service along with the Razumkov Center conducted a nationwide poll of 2007 respondents aged 18 and up in all of the 27 administrative regions in Ukraine. The returns cited below reflect the general sentiments of the electorate for whose votes the country's political parties are already competing.

Viktor Yushchenko's actions are fully supported by 22.4% of respondents. This figure exceeds, considerably, the level of popular trust in any other politician, but is a quarter lower than two months ago when Yushchenko enjoyed the complete support of 29.9% of Ukrainians. This can hardly make the leader of «Our Ukraine» [election bloc of political parties] anxious, nor can it make him wonder. The announcement of the bloc's creation was met by many with enthusiasm. Naturally, any bloc headed by Viktor Yushchenko would be popular among voters and would surely be supported at the elections. But the first course on their table was never followed by the main, hot one - apparently, the cooks are a bit too slow. That's why it's logical to suppose: when the voters are told about the bloc's composition, its top five names, its allies, when they hear something distinct about its program and further steps, the percentage of their support will be different. And so far everything follows a logical path...

The popular support for the radical opposition's leaders has tapered, though almost invisibly. Yulia Tymoshenko's actions were fully supported by 4.6% and Olexander Moroz's - by 4.8% of respondents in August whereas the June figures were 5.4% and 5.3% respectively. The support for their actions is still somewhat higher than the support for their political opponents - Viktor Medvedchuk and Yevhen Marchuk whose actions are fully supported by 4% of respondents.

Now a few words about those whose popularity has grown. In spite of the mass media's unfriendly attitude, the National Salvation Forum keeps scoring points: its activity was fully supported by 6.5% of respondents in August whereas the June figure was 5.3%. The number of those who support particular actions by NSF has grown, too: 18.8% in August versus 14.6% in June. Also, the number of people whose attitude to NSF is still uncertain has decreased: 54.6% in June, 47.2% in August.

The growing positive attitude to Anatolii Kinakh's government can be explained by the fact that it hasn't made any sudden moves so far and thus has avoided blunders. In June, the government's activity was appraised positively by 6.6% of respondents, and in August the figure was 7.8%.

The President's index has improved substantially. In August, 13.4% of respondents expressed their support for him whereas the figure in June was lower - 11.2%. Small wonder, with such impressive media coverage of his activities, especially on such an impressive background as the 10th anniversary of Independence.

Notably, the majority of Ukrainians are positive about this data: 50.3% of respondents believe it to be a real holiday, another 14.9% deem it as Ukraine's biggest official holiday. Since everything positive in Ukraine's independent history was tied by most media to the President's name, the holiday was sure to add to his rating.

One more step by Leonid Kuchma found a positive response amongst the people: he promised not to run for a third term of presidency. The respondents were asked if they would vote for Kuchma at the next presidential elections if there were legal grounds for his nomination to the third term. Every fifth (19.7%) gave a positive answer. However, the overwhelming majority of adult population (77.3%) supported the President's decision saying they would not insist on his re-election. Evidently the people believe that the President, not preoccupied with election campaigning, is able to do much more good to the country in his remaining time. But we shouldn't exclude other possible reasons for those 77.3% to say «no». Judging, at least, from the popular attitude to the idea of a national referendum on the President's resignation initiated by the irreconcilable opposition. Should such a referendum be held today, its results would upset the President's supporters. The interest in the referendum has dwindled in the last three months: in May, 84.6% of respondents confirmed their intention of taking part in the referendum, but in August the number was much smaller - 77.6% (although even that would quite enough to declare the referendum valid). But its returns would practically be the same. In May, 62.6% of respondents said they would give a positive answer to the question formulated by its organizers (recommending the President to resign). The August figure was 62.1%. It should be said, however, that the very wording of the question prompts a positive answer.

The image of Ukraine and its President was promoted a lot by the Pope's visit [June 24 - 27]. Despite the protest campaign waged by the Russian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church [Moscow Patriarchy] and Russian mass media, the Ukrainians accepted the visit with great interest. Practically two-thirds of the country's population followed it: 4.1% of respondents attended the liturgies served by the Pope, and 61.6% followed the visit as covered by mass media. Nearly a half (49.2%) of respondents appraise the visit to Ukraine by John Paul II positively, and only 10.9% - negatively. The rest were either neutral - 37%, or found it difficult to answer - 2.9%. But the public opinion on the reasons for the visit divided. One-third (34.4%) of respondents believe that it was chiefly a pastoral visit. 28.2% tend to view the visit as having a cultural, humanitarian cause. 21.4% agreed that the visit was chiefly political. 16% gave no definite answer. Besides, Ukrainians don't expect the visit to result in aggravations of relations between the Orthodox confessions. 29.8% of respondents believe that it will only improve these relations, and only 11.9% believe that it will aggravate them. The majority of respondents (39.6%) don't expect the Pontiff's visit to make any influence on these relations at all. 18.7% failed to answer.

This summer has produced a positive effect on the popular trust in the mass media, both national and foreign. In August, the national mass media were completely trusted by 12.2% of Ukrainians, another 43.9% trusted them more than not. The June returns were 10.4% and 40.3% respectively. 9.8% of respondents trust in the Russian mass media, and 8.4% - in the Western media (7.3% and 8.4% respectively in June). The above figures don't necessarily mean that the Ukrainian media in the eyes of Ukrainians are more truthful than the foreign media. Obviously, the simple reason is that the people have less access to the latter, and so are unable to assess their trust in them. 25% of respondents failed to answer definitely how much they trusted the Western media, 13.5% - the Russian media, while the figure for the Ukrainian media was a mere 5.1%.

Among various public institutions, the greatest popularity is still enjoyed by the Church. It is completely trusted by 29.9% of respondents, another 30% trust it more than not.

But the level of trust in the law enforcement remains extremely low. A mere 9% of citizens trusted the police completely in August (10% in June, 11.8% in July last year). Not many trust it even in part - 19.4%. That is, the police enjoy at least some degree of trust by less than one-third of Ukrainian citizens.

The Prosecutor General's Office, too, has things to peruse. Mr. Potabenko's office was fully trusted by only 10% of respondents in August, and trusted more than not by 20.4%.

The same negative attitude is held toward the key element of a democratic state - the Court. In August, it was fully trusted only by 9.8% of respondents, whereas the June figure was 11.5%. 21.4% trust the Court more than not. On the whole, less than one-third of Ukrainians trust in the Judiciary. In these circumstances it is too early to talk about irreversible democratic transformations in this country.

The situation with the trust in the Security Service and the Armed Forces is visibly improving. The Security Service is completely trusted by 16.7% of respondents (14.3% in June), and trusted more than not by another 28.7% (27.3% in June). The trust in the Defense is the highest: the Armed Forces are completely trusted by 22.8% of respondents (23.1% in June), more trusted than not by 35.6% (36.1% in June). So, as it turns out, our people are far more confident in their security against their foreign enemies than domestic ones.

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